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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001488

SIPDIS

CA/VO/I, CA/VO/L

E.O. 26598: N/A

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [CMGT](#) [AMGT](#)

SUBJECT: Advisory Opinion Request: Restriction on Issuance of Non-Immigrant Visas in Honduran Diplomatic Passports

1. Summary. In light of the widespread abuse of diplomatic passports in Honduras, and the request from the MFA to assist the GOH in curbing the misuse of these passports by persons not entitled to have them, or by persons no longer entitled to use them, Post proposes to modify how we provide Non-Immigrant Visas to Honduran citizens who possess diplomatic passports. We submit a draft diplomatic note explaining the new restrictions. End Summary.

2. Background. Several months ago, MFA officials approached us to request help in curbing the unauthorized use of Honduran diplomatic passports. There is little or no accountability for diplomatic passport issuance in Honduras and persons traveling with them are exempt from paying exit fees as well as duties and taxes on goods brought into the country. They also effectively avoid paying the MRV fee. The GOH estimates that there are approximately forty thousand of these passports currently in circulation. The majority are in the hands of former appointed and elected government officials and their families who have terminated their official duties, but failed or refused to surrender the passports. The GOH has publicly requested the return of these passports, without success. In addition, an unknown number of Honduran diplomatic, official, and regular passports were stolen from the passport office in San Pedro Sula approximately two years ago.

2. We propose sending a diplomatic note to the GOH, a draft of which is attached, after we receive your guidance on how best to adhere to the regulatory guidelines on providing visas of any classification to holders of diplomatic passports.

Begin text. The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Honduras and wishes to inform the Ministry of a policy change regarding visa applications from certain government officials and others who possess diplomatic passports.

Effective immediately, bearers of diplomatic passports in the following categories are exempt from the \$100.00 processing fee for nonimmigrant visas: a) current Head of State and alternates; b) current Cabinet ministers and vice ministers; c) active duty military officers holding a rank not inferior to that of a U.S. Brigadier General or Rear Admiral; d) career diplomats; e) ambassadors, officers of the diplomatic service, consular officers, and military attaches assigned to a foreign diplomatic mission; f) officers of delegations assigned to an international organization; g) magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice; h) territorial governors and their alternates; i) presiding officers of the national legislature; and j) spouse and unmarried dependent children of the above.

The Embassy will continue to accept applications for diplomatic visas on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. All applications must be accompanied by a photograph of the applicant, a diplomatic note stating the individual's government position, and travel plans. The Embassy of the United States requests that all persons in possession of a current visa for the United States, of any classification, in a non-diplomatic passport, present this visa to the consular officer at the time of the application for a visa in the bearer's diplomatic passport. Persons on the list above will be issued visas upon receipt of a diplomatic note that expressly states that the bearer is on official duty status for the Government of Honduras. Persons who only possess a diplomatic passport, but are traveling on personal business or pleasure must also present evidence that they have paid the proper visa fee. Visas are normally issued in three business days. An employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may drop off the application.

The Embassy of the United States of America avails itself of this opportunity to reiterate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the assurances of its highest consideration.

3. We receive a large number of diplomatic notes requesting visas for Hondurans who possess diplomatic passports, but who have no current official role in Honduran governmental

affairs. Some already have valid tourist visas in their regular passports, but want visas in their diplomatic passports to avoid paying exit fees and duties on consumer products. Many applicants who have diplomatic passports do not have valid regular passports. They want to travel on the diplomatic passport for personal business and avoid paying the duties, taxes, and the one hundred dollar MRV fee.

14. Establishing the proposed modification would provide the MFA with the support it needs to refuse diplomatic notes to persons using diplomatic passports to get visas for personal travel to the U.S. It would force persons who have regular passports, with valid visas, to use them. It would simplify the process for obtaining diplomatic visas. And, it would prevent applicants from using diplomatic passports to avoid paying the MRV fee. We request your opinion on the most expeditious manner to correct this misuse of the diplomatic privilege.  
PIERCE